

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 10087

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, PINT, ZM, IT
SUBJECT: ITALIAN CHIEFS OF STAFF: OPINIONS ON AFRICA, YUGO-
SLAVIA, MALTA AND RECENT ITALIAN ADMINISTRATIVE
ELECTIONS

1. DURING A MAY 18 FLIGHT TO SARDINIA TO OBSERVE AN AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISE, CINCSOUTH SHEAR HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS A NUMBER OF ISSUES WITH THE ITALIAN CHIEFS OF STAFF, METTIMANO (AIR FORCE), RAMBALDI (ARMY) AND TORRISI (NAVY). THESE SOURCES SHOULD BE PROTECTED FULLY. ADMIRAL SHEAR HAS SHARED WITH US THE FOLLOWING OPINIONS OF THE ITALIAN CHIEFS OF ISSUES OF CURRENT INTEREST. THEY ARE SUBMITTED MORE AS A REFLECTION OF SENIOR ITALIAN MILITARY CONCERNS THAN AS OFFERING MUCH THAT IS NEW IN SUBSTANCE.

2. AFRICA. ALL THREE OFFICERS EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF THE USSR AND CUBA ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. THEY CONSIDER THE SITUATION THROUGHOUT AFRICA TO BE GRAVE AND WERE CONCERNED THAT THE WEST HAD NOT TAKEN A STRONG STAND. THEY SAW SOVIET GOALS IN AFRICA AS THE DOMINATION OF THE CONTINENT, CONTROL OVER OIL TRANSPORT ROUTES, AND
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THE COUNTER CHINESE COMPETITION.

3. YUGOSLAVIA. THE CHIEFS WERE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE TRANSITION OF THE BELGRADE GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING THE PASSING OF TITO. THEY BELIEVE IT WILL NOT BE AS SMOOTH AS PREDICTED BY SOME OBSERVERS. THEY EXPECT THERE WILL BE HEAVY PRESSURE FROM THE SOVIETS. THE CHIEFS ARE NOT

PARTICULARLY IMPRESSED BY THE FIGHTING QUALITIES OF THE YUGOSLAV ARMED FORCES AND DO NOT BELIEVE THEY COULD MAKE AN ORGANIZED STAND AGAINST SOVIET TROOPS. IN A CONVENTIONAL CONFLICT THE RUSSIANS WOULD SIMPLY ROLL OVER THEM. HOWEVER, THEY ADMITTED, THE YUGOSLAVS ARE SUPERB IN GUERRILLA WARFARE, BUT THAT ELEMENT RESPONDS TO A SITUATION VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM OFFERING INITIAL RESISTANCE TO AN INVASION FORCE.

4. MALTA. GENERAL RAMBALDI HAD A CONVERSATION WITH MINTOFF A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO. THE THRUST OF MINTOFF'S ARGUMENT WAS THAT ITALY AND THE NATIONS OF THE WEST SHOULD PROVIDE PROPER SUPPORT FOR MALTA. MINTOFF TOLD RAMBALDI (ACCORDING TO RAMBALDI) THAT HENCEFORTH HE WANTED TO TALK TO THE MILITARY, WHO UNDERSTOOD THE PROBLEMS. HE WANTED NO MORE OF DIPLOMATS. THE ITALIAN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT BELIEVES THAT THE SITUATION THERE WILL BECOME QUITE SERIOUS NEXT YEAR FOLLOWING THE FINAL BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ISLAND AND THE END OF NATO FINANCIAL SUPPORT. THEY CONSIDER MINTOFF A COMPLETE OPPORTUNIST WHO IS NOT ABOVE CASTING ABOUT FOR A LIAISON WITH THE LIBYANS OR THE SOVIETS.

5. ITALIAN ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTION RESULTS. ALL THREE OFFICERS WERE HIGHLY PLEASED WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE RECENT ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTIONS. THOUGH THEY ACCEPTED CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE MORO AFFAIR HAD AN IMPACT ON THE VOTING, THEY BELIEVED THAT IT REPRESENTED A GENUINE SHIFT AWAY FROM THE LEFT AND A TREND LIKELY TO CONTINUE. THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE PCI VOTE REDUCED TO NO MORE THAN 25 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE, AND TO SEE THE EMERGENCE OF A STRONG SECOND PARTY, NAMELY THE PSI. A SECOND PARTY IN THEIR VIEW WAS NECESSARY TO OFFER COMPETITION TO THE DC AND A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE ITALIAN VOTER. GENERAL RAMBALDI TOOK A PARTICULARLY HARD ANTI-COMMUNIST LINE, BASED, HE SAID, ON THREE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN MOSCOW. COMMUNISM AND COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY HAVE NO PLACE IN ITALY, HE ASSERTED. BUT THE ITALIAN PEOPLE DO NEED A ALTERNATIVE PARTY THROUGH WHICH TO EXPRESS THEIR CONCERN OVER FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. THE LACK OF THAT ALTERNATIVE HAS BEEN ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL REASONS FOR COMMUNIST GAINS OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. GARDNER

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